

SGI President Ikeda's Essay
The Flowers of Friendship
By HO GOKU

It was a dramatic change — from wintry Tokyo to the eternal summer of Manila. The tropical sun was bright, penetrating. The beautiful sunset on Manila Bay, famous the world over, lived up to its celebrated reputation. It was my first visit in five years.

The streets of Manila were neat and orderly, and the scenery was more breathtaking than ever. In every respect, the nation overflowed with a vibrant sense of pride and self-confidence that comes with victory and glory. The Philippines had indeed made remarkable progress.



On Feb. 9, the Order of the Knights of Rizal, inheritors of the ideals of the great hero of Philippine independence, Dr. José Rizal (1861–96), presented me with the 1st Rizal International Peace Award. It commemorates this year's centennial of Philippine independence. And I had the honor of being the very first recipient.

In spite of his busy schedule, Republic of the Philippines President Fidel V. Ramos made an appearance at the presentation ceremony, held at the Philippine International Convention Center, and offered his congratulations. I am deeply grateful for his kind consideration.

In addition, on Feb. 11, the birthday of my mentor, Josei Toda, the University of the City of Manila presented me with an honorary doctorate in the humanities. This is the first institution of higher learning in Asia to offer a system of free tuition, making quite a name for itself and setting a fine example as a university of the people.

All his life, Mr. Toda wished for the happiness of his fellow Asians. He composed this poem:

*To the people of Asia
Who pray for a glimpse of the moon
Through the parting clouds,
Let us send them, instead,
The light of the sun.*

I am sure that Mr. Toda rejoices from the bottom of his heart at these honors bestowed on me. The night of Feb. 11, as if to celebrate Mr. Toda's birthday, a luminous, fairy-tale full moon smiled down on Manila.



The barbaric acts of the Japanese military during World War II claimed many, many Filipino victims and left deep scars there. Yet during that terrible tempest of aggression, the Soka Gakkai's noble founding president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and his successor, Josei Toda, remained adamantly opposed to the forces of militarism.

How noble they were. How great they were in fearlessly putting their lives on the line for their beliefs!

As a result, the Philippine people have shown great trust in the SGI, which was born from the brave conviction of Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda. The Philippine people have

supported us warmly.

I express my deepest respect for their generous and perceptive understanding.



On the evening of Feb. 11, the Order of the Knights of Rizal conferred the award of Knight Grand Cross of Rizal on King Juan Carlos I of Spain. Having received the same honor myself (in 1996), as well as the Order's first peace award, I attended the presentation ceremony and offered my congratulations.

King Juan Carlos patiently endured more than 20 years of the Franco regime that ruled Spain. When at last the dictatorship began to crumble, he immediately took steps to lead the Spanish people to the establishment of a democratic republic.

The Philippines had a long, sad history of subjugation as a colony of Spain. José Rizal was executed by the Spanish military.

It is common for one person to hate another because of the treatment his or her people have received at the other party's hands in centuries past. Yet members of the Order of the Knights of Rizal have rejected this. They have refused to view people solely in terms of nationality or to be bound by the past, keeping alive ancient hates and conflicts. They recognized the praiseworthy achievements of King Juan Carlos for what they were and honored them accordingly.

I see in this act the keen perception of the Philippine people, their profound spirit of friendship and forgiveness.



If the 21st century is to be a century of peace, a spirit of tolerance is indispensable. But tolerance and compromise are different. Compromise is the product of self-preservation, self-interest and a spiritual poverty. It results in compliance with evil. And, finally, in our own corruption.

Tolerance, though, is always founded on a clear understanding of the difference between good and evil. It is the product of strong personal commitment. Tolerance is the light of true humanity, forged through suffering and hardship. It is this light that fosters the growth of friendship.

We of the SGI are dedicated to the lofty cause of kosen-rufu. A vast realm of tolerance — of generosity and goodwill toward others — unfolds in our hearts. Happy smiles and animated dialogue, the flowers of friendship, bloom wherever SGI members go.

The pure white sampaguita, the national flower of the Philippines, smiles up at the sun, praising the fellowship of our friends in this lovely land and their future.

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